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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2621

INFO RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE

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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 000513

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/01/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [PBTS](#) [MOPS](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [PK](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: SEPARATISTS CONTEMPLATING JOINING 2008 JAMMU AND KASHMIR ELECTIONS IF INDIA ACTS

REF: A. NEW DELHI 343

[B.](#) NEW DELHI 406

[C.](#) NEW DELHI OI 01/25/07

[D.](#) NEW DELHI OI 01/18/07

[E.](#) NEW DELHI OI 02/01/07

[F.](#) KESHAP - INDIA DESK EMAIL 01/22/07

[G.](#) KESHAP - INDIA DESK EMAIL 01/23/07

[H.](#) GRENCIK - SCHWARTZ EMAIL 02/01/07

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Classified By: PolCouns Ted Osius, Reason 1.5 (B,D)

[11.](#) (U) This is an ACTION REQUEST for SCA. Please see paragraph 8.

[12.](#) (S) Summary: Moderate Kashmiri separatist Bilal Lone met with Deputy PolCouns on January 31st to discuss his January 19 to 27 trip to Pakistan with All Parties Hurriyat Council (APHC) leader Mirwaiz Omar Farooq. Bilal told us President Musharraf had been very optimistic about achieving a breakthrough with India on Kashmir, and warned the Hurriyat that they should not expect to see India withdraw its security forces entirely from the Srinagar Valley or agree to change its borders if the two sides reach an agreement. Lone also said the APHC would decide in the next four months if it will run in the 2008 Kashmir elections, and the group was looking to India for minor concessions to make this bold move possible. He warned, however, that if the four months run out without some movement, they would have to wait again until 2014 to test the electoral process. Just hours after the meeting, terrorists hurled a grenade at the APHC's Srinagar office -- causing no casualties, but sending a

further warning on the eve of the delegation's return to Srinagar that the group remains under serious threat from those violently opposed to Indo-Pak peace efforts. End Summary.

Fear and Loathing in Srinagar

¶3. (S) Deputy PolCouns met with moderate Kashmiri separatist Bilal Lone on January 31st to discuss the APHC's January 19th to 27th trip to Pakistan and the subsequent response in India to the APHC leader Mirwaiz Omar Farooq's renunciation of violent struggle for Kashmir. Just hours later, terrorists threw a grenade at the APHC's Srinagar office, warning once again that the group's activists are marked for assassination. Adding to our concerns for his security, Bilal told us he and the Mirwaiz were planning a heavily hyped return to Srinagar on February 1st, for which they are hoping to generate large crowds. Despite the January 31st grenade attack and an earlier attack on the Mirwaiz's house, there is no indication that the two have altered their plans to parade visibly through the streets in open vehicles. Bilal said the APHC must have this show of strength to demonstrate that the hardline led by Sayeed Ali Shah Geelani does not have all of the political power in the Valley. The two then plan to return to New Delhi on February 3rd and stay for several weeks to let things cool off again in Srinagar. They warn, however, that the terrorist threat will remain acute and they may not be safe even in Delhi.

Optimistic on Pakistan

¶4. (S) Bilal spoke favorably of Musharraf, saying the

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Pakistani President was very optimistic about how talks were progressing. He said Musharraf had warned the APHC that any settlement that results from the India-Pakistan talks is unlikely to change India's borders. Bilal said that when the delegation asked if India would pull its security forces out of the Srinagar Valley, Musharraf said, "no, how can they? They may return to cantonments, but the security forces will remain." Bilal commented further that any resolution needed a symbol of change in Kashmir, such as a Kashmiri Prime Minister, which would allow the people to feel they had gotten something from their struggle.

Preparing for Elections?

¶5. (S) Bilal said futher that the APHC was considering joining elections in 2008, but conditions on the ground in Srinagar had to improve in order to make it safe enough for the group to do this. He said the APHC needed to make some progress with India, gaining some small concessions so the APHC could say they brought something home for the Kashmiri people from their efforts. Bilal said a meeting with the Indian Prime Minister or prisoner releases alone would not help because they would not change the conditions on the ground for Kashmiris. Instead he said new CBMs to soften the LOC would be more useful, including allowing Kashmiris on both sides of the LOC to drive their own cars to the other side, opening the LOC to trade and transport from Muzzaferabad to Srinagar, permitting mobile phone links between the two cities, and reducing the paperwork for travel across the LOC on the bus. Bilal warned that Prime Minister Singh likely had approximately a four month window to make some progress, until May or June 2007, when the snows melt in Kashmir (allowing terrorist infiltration) and political campaigning begins in earnest in the Valley for 2008. If you don't see a breakthrough in that time, Bilal opined, all their hopes will be dashed until 2014. All cannot change overnight, he said, but we could begin a process toward normalization. Further, he warned, there is rising extremism in Srinagar, fueled by anger over international events, and

he worried that the next generation of Kashmiri youth would create a resurgence of violence if the conflict is not resolved for this round of elections.

Uniting All Parties

¶6. (S) Bilal spoke also about his party's efforts to unite the rest of the moderate separatist leaders in Srinagar along a single platform. He said the group would try to approach Yasin Malik about joining its efforts, or at least not to openly oppose them, increasing their chances of being killed.

Shabir Shah, he explained, was a fence sitter, and they would also approach him. He said he believed Geelani, however, was hardened into his position, and unlikely to change. Bilal also said that he and his brother, Sajjad, had patched up their personal differences and were speaking to each other with some regularity. We will try to unite all the parties, he said, because this is crucial to our ability to join elections.

Hurdles to Go With Much on the Line

¶7. (S) Comment: Bilal is not asking for small gestures from

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New Delhi. The APHC is unlikely to join 2008 elections unless they believe they can win, at least in the Valley, because elections are a test of their as yet unproven, and perhaps limited, political base. To have a fighting chance of winning in the Valley, they must unite the majority of the separatist elements under a single voting block and create a grass-roots organizational structure. All of these steps are a tall order in four months when dialogue has not even begun in earnest between the Congress-led government and the APHC. Nonetheless, as this most recent grenade attack reminds us once again, both Bilal and the Mirwaiz are taking great risks in the hope of reaching some sort of settlement -- breaking political barriers that no Kashmiri separatist has crossed in the past and lived to tell about. The ghost of Mirwaiz's father and uncle, and of Bilal's father, bear witness to the very real risk run by peace-makers in the Valley. End comment.

ACTION REQUEST

¶8. (S) ACTION REQUEST FOR SCA: Per refs, given how much Delhi and Islamabad have riding on the moderate Kashmiris, and given the immediate danger posed to the Mirwaiz, Bilal Lone, and other moderates in the APHC, we request that a senior U.S. official find a near term opportunity to state publicly our unequivocal condemnation of the attacks on the APHC. We also ask that senior SCA officials privately raise the militants, threats to the Kashmiri moderates with Pakistan's Ambassador in Washington, underscoring the repercussions for the peace process should they be harmed in a terrorist attack. End action request. Note: This message has been coordinated with Embassy Islamabad.

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